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No. 6.

THE CHARACTER AND DUTY

OF A

CHRISTIAN PREACHER.

BY DAVID BOSTWICK, A.M.*

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord."—2 Cor. 4: 5.

Were I to give a brief and summary description of man's original apostasy in few words, I would choose to say, that it was a departing from God, the author and fountain of blessedness, and retiring into himself as his last and ultimate end: and that the sum of his moral depravity, consists in a habitual disposition to treat himself in the same manner that he ought to treat the God of Heaven; that is, to love himself supremely, and seek himself ultimately and finally, and set up himself in one shape or another, as the grand center to which all the lines of his busy thoughts, anxious cares, and subtile projects, bend, and in which they terminate.

While he continued in his original state of moral rectitude, that God who was the author of his being was his beginning and end, his interest and attraction, his desire and delight, and, in a word, his all. But when sin took place in his heart, it warped the unhappy creature from his God to himself; insomuch that self is now become all to corrupt and depraved nature, even as God was once

* Preached at Philadelphia before the Synod of New-York, May 26, 1758.

all to nature uncorrupted and undepraved. Selfishness is therefore now become the most active and reigning principle in fallen nature, and, like the first wheel in a grand machine, sets the whole world in motion. For if we survey the conduct of busy mortals, in the various ranks and degrees, characters and circumstances of life, we shall easily perceive that self is the idol they are naturally disposed to worship, and selfishness the grand interest to which they are by nature entirely devoted.

We find ourselves in the midst of an active, busy world, the inhabitants of which are ever engaged in some vigorous pursuits. But what are they pursuing? What is the governing principle of their actions? And what the center to which they bend, and in which they terminate? Are they laboring for God as their ultimate end, or for themselves? When the merchant compasseth sea and land, in search of a worldly treasure, does he this for God, or for himself? When the soldier boldly enters the field of battle, faces death in its most hideous forms, and opens his bosom to the most pregnant dangers, does he this for the honor of God, or for the honor of himself? When the industrious tradesman rises early, and sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness, and fills up his swift succeeding hours with the most painful and assiduous labor, does he labor ultimately for God, or for himself? When men of superior rank, and greater affluence, devote their wasting moments to the fashionable diversions and pleasurable entertainments of life, do they this to please and glorify God, or to please and gratify self? In a word, what is it in general that men live for, and what are they doing in the world? What are their thoughts spent, their words spoken, their hands employed, and their time improved for? Is it for God, or themselves? Alas, how easy it is to see the awful prevalence of this corrupt and accursed principle! It is self that rules kingdoms, that governs families, drives on their trade, manages their worldly business; that chooses even their religion, and influences their whole conduct; that lies at the root and bottom of all their actual sins, makes them ungodly, and keeps them ungodly, and is their very ungodliness itself.

And, oh! that it might be said, with undoubted truth, that notwithstanding the general prevalence of this detestable principle, among the various ranks and orders of men, there is at least one order exempt from the general charge; and that none who sustain the sacred character, are influenced by mercenary principles, or selfish motives; but that each individual could safely adopt the language of the apostle, in behalf of himself and brethren: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord."

In the preceding chapter, the apostle had been magnifying his office, on account of the excellency and glory of that Gospel, which was the subject of it: and in this, he vindicates the ministry of the apostles and Gospel ministers, from the unjust accusations of false and Judaizing teachers, who had charged them with walking in craftiness, and handling the word of the Lord deceitfully. He avouches their sincerity, that they renounced the hidden things of dishonesty; and as a proof of their integrity, he assures them, that their business was to preach Christ, and not themselves. "We preach not ourselves, says he, and therefore are not a set of designing men, as our accusers would insinuate; self is neither the matter, nor the end of our preaching; we neither teach our own notions, passions, or prejudices, for the word of God, nor do we seek ourselves, or the advancement of our secular interest and glory: but we preach Christ Jesus the Lord, and endeavor to make him known to the world in each of these amiable characters, as Messiah, the Christ of God, as Jesus, the Saviour of men, and as Lord and King in his Church; and to advance the interest of his glorious kingdom among men."

From these words I shall attempt to show:

I. What that selfishness is which the apostle here disclaims; or, when ministers may be said to preach themselves.

II. I shall consider some of the operations of that selfish principle, in those particular instances that tend to discover its reigning dominion. And then,

III. Show what it is to preach Christ Jesus the Lord.

And lastly, improve the whole.

Let us then inquire,

I. What that selfishness is which the apostle here disclaims, etc. And to set this in a proper light, and prevent mistakes, I must observe negatively. 1st, It is not that regular self-love that induces ministers to zeal and faithfulness in the discharge of their sacred trust, from the consideration of future rewards and punishments. There is a self-love implanted in human nature that is consistent with complete rectitude, and therefore is not the effect of our moral depravity. This Adam had in his state of perfect innocence, or else the promises of rewards would have been no inducement to obedience, nor would the severest threatenings have deterred him, in any measure, from disobedience. It is not, therefore, a criminal selfishness, for ministers to have a suitable regard to their own future and everlasting interest, and to be influenced to diligence and industry, in their great important work, by motives drawn from those future and eternal realities. It was doubtless agreeable to the God of heaven, that Ezekiel the prophet should be influenced to faithfulness in giving warning, from that awful consideration, that the "blood of those that perished should otherwise be required at his hand." And when the apostle urged Timothy to "take heed to himself and his doctrine, and continue in them," he would have him influenced by these considerations, that he "should save himself, and them that heard him." Nor was even St. Paul entirely above the influence of this motive, when he gave this reason, why "he kept his body under subjection; lest, when he had preached to others, himself should be a cast-away." It was not an unreasonable selfishness in the prophet Isaiah to take encouragement under all his complaints, and be animated in his work, from the consideration that "though Israel was not gathered, yet he should be glorious in the eyes of the Lord."

2dly, This disclaiming ourselves does not imply a total disregard to our reputation and character among men; for on this the success of our ministry, and consequently the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, may, in some measure, depend. If the character of a Gospel minister is stained with false and ill-natured asper-

sions, this tends to mar his influence, and consequently his usefulness. It is therefore noways inconsistent with a Gospel self-denial, to seek a vindication of himself and his abused reputation. The apostle himself does so, in this and his other epistles; and says, no man shall stop him in this boasting. It ever becomes the ministers of Christ to have a tender regard to their reputation and character, as subservient to the great ends of their ministry, and in which the honor of Christ, and the interest of religion, is nearly concerned. It becomes a bishop to be blameless, and an officer in the Church of God to be of good report; yea, and to maintain the authority of his sacred character, "and let no man despise him." Indeed, if our reputation among men of carnal corrupt minds suffers for our faithfulness in the discharge of our sacred trust, and "men speak all manner of evil against us falsely for Christ's sake, (which is not at all uncommon,) in this case, our honor, interest, and reputation, and even life itself, is to be given up, and made a willing sacrifice to the honor and interest of Jesus Christ; "not counting our own life (much less our name and reputation) dear, that we may finish our course, and the ministry we have received of the Lord Jesus."

But, secondly, and positively, the selfishness here disclaimed is, in general, that which stands in direct opposition to the honor of God, and the interest of Jesus Christ. That sets up self in the room and place of God, in our estimation, affections, intentions and pursuits; and disposes us to love and value ourselves in the same manner as we ought to love and value the God of heaven; to prefer our honor to his honor, and our interest to the interest of Jesus Christ; and in a word, to regard ourselves supremely, and seek ourselves ultimately and finally, and to be influenced inordinately, in one shape or other, by mercenary views, and selfish motives in all we do. It is, therefore, nothing less, on the whole, than a direct contending with the God of heaven, and maintaining a dispute with him who shall be most loved and regarded by us, he or we, and whose honor and interest shall be primarily and ultimately pursued, his or our own.

But more particularly, this selfishness in public preach-

ing may be considered both materially and formally; or as it respects the subject matter, and the formal manner, of our preaching.

1st, Then, ministers may be said to preach themselves, when the matter of their public preaching is such that it tends rather to promote self-honor and self-interest than the honor of God, and the interest of Jesus Christ. When the substance of their sermons is only "the enticing words of man's wisdom, calculated rather to gratify men's curiosity with pleasing speculations, than to pierce their hearts with pungent convictions; and has a greater tendency to please their fancies than to convert and save their souls. When, in the matter of their preaching, they conform to men's vitiated taste and corrupt humors, and rather soothe and flatter than strive to awaken and alarm their consciences; endeavoring rather to win them to themselves, and gain them over to their own self-interest, than to win them to Christ and convert them to God. In a word, we are awfully guilty of this criminal selfishness when our sermons have rather a tendency, in their matter and composition to commend ourselves than to commend the Lord Jesus Christ; and to beget in the corrupt hearts of our hearers an esteem of our persons, gifts, and abilities, rather than of the person, glory, and offices of the great Redeemer, the ever adorable God-Man, Jesus Christ.

2dly, This selfishness respects the form as well as the matter of our preaching, that is, the governing principle from which we act in our public ministry, and the ultimate end we have in view. And this is doubtless the principal thing here intended; for be the matter of our preaching ever so good, yet self may be the root and bottom of it all, and the object of our principal aim. Nothing is more evident than that we may do the work of God, and that which is really so, as to the matter or thing done; and yet not do it for God, as to the formal manner, but rather for ourselves. Thus Jehu did the work of the Lord when he executed the vengeance of Jehovah on the house and family of wicked Ahab; and when he broke down the images of Baal, and restored Israel from idolatry; and yet he did it not for God, but

for himself, as appears by his proud boast, "come see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts."

It is not at all inconsistent to say, that ministers may calculate their sermons, both as a matter, method, and manner of delivery, so as to have an aptitude and tendency to answer the great ends of preaching, and yet may preach themselves, as to the principle from which they act, and the ultimate end they have in view. Nor is it at all to be wondered at, if in a time when the most zealous, lively, and practical preaching, the most earnest addresses to the heart and conscience are in vogue, and tend most to recommend the preacher, and promote his reputation, that mere selfish principles should induce men to attempt these, and even strive to excel therein. So that though we preach ever so well, as to the matter and method of our sermons, and with ever so much apparent zeal and fervor, in the delivery of them, yet if we fail as to the formal manner, and aim chiefly and ultimately at ourselves, our honor, interest, and reputation, we are found guilty of that criminal selfishness which the apostle disclaims; and are making idols of ourselves by treating ourselves in the manner we ought to treat the great God of heaven and earth. This is the selfishness here disclaimed, and this it is for men to preach themselves. I am

II. To consider some of the operations of this corrupt principle, in those particular instances that tend to discover its reigning dominion. In every unsanctified heart, self in one shape or other is ever uppermost, and has an entire ascendancy and governing influence in every thing they do. When, therefore, men of this character take upon them the office of the Gospel-ministry, self must be their grand motive, and their principal inducement. For, though a faithful discharge of this important trust requires more self-denial that any employment under the sun, yet there are many things in the sacred office that may be alluring baits to men of corrupt and selfish minds. A tolerable maintenance, or comfortable subsistence in the world, may be an inducement to such as know not better how to provide for themselves; who, like the unjust steward, are unwilling to dig and ashamed to beg, and therefore choose this rather than a meaner employment.

Thus, in the degenerate times of the Church of old, men would "crouch for a piece of silver, and say, Put me, I pray thee, into the priest's office, that I may eat a piece of bread." And hence that bitter complaint, that "the priests taught for hire, and the prophets divined for money;" and on this account they were called "greedy dogs that could never have enough, and shepherds that did not understand, looking every one for his gain from his quarter." Let none understand me as though I insinuated, that ministers have not a right to insist on a sufficient maintenance and an honorable support; for whatever a carnal selfish world may imagine, it will be found true at last, that God (and not man) "hath ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." Nor do I in the least doubt, but the too general neglect of this duty among people to their ministers, is one of the crying and God-provoking sins of the present day. (See Mal. 3 : 8, 9, 10.) What I am proving is, that self, in its reigning dominion, may influence men to undertake the sacred employment with such sordid views. And this is necessarily supposed, in the apostle's frequent exhortations to ministers, "not to be greedy of filthy lucre, nor be given to filthy lucre, nor teach things for filthy lucre's sake." The inducement of the apostle himself (as of every other faithful minister) was vastly different. A necessity, says he: "is laid upon me, and woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." And he could say, with the utmost sincerity to the Corinthian Church, "I seek not your's, but you."

Again, a life of study, and an opportunity to furnish the mind with the various improvements of human science, may be an inducement to those who have a turn for speculation, and would be willing to shine and make some figure in literature, from mere selfish principles to undertake the ministry. And, would you believe it, sirs? The supposed ease and indolence of a minister's life, by those who know nothing of the many cares, fatigues, and perplexities of it, may possibly induce a selfish man, who is willing to favor the flesh, to enter upon it. Nor is it at all unlikely that the reverence and respect shown to the sacred character among men may influence those

who are chiefly seeking themselves. 'Tis agreeable to a proud, selfish mortal to be looked upon and respected as the leader and guide of the people, and to have others dependent on him, and "receive the law at his mouth."

Now, when such alluring baits as these are the principal inducements to the ministry, the reigning dominion of a selfish principal is exceedingly evident. And as these undertake the sacred employment for themselves, and not for God, so they will ever "preach themselves, and not Christ Jesus the Lord." For the same principle, while uppermost in their hearts, will attend and govern them in every branch of their ministerial conduct. It will go with them into their private studies, and there will choose their subject, form and methodize their sermons, and oftentimes make them more attentive to mere words and ornaments than to the sacred truths of God. And hence, instead of plain and serious addresses, that might tend to melt and change hard and unchanged hearts, they will abound with trifling speculations, set off with glittering toys, with figures of rhetoric, and arts of elocution. Or instead of instructing their people in the great things that concern their everlasting welfare, they go beyond their capacity, and teach them nothing but that they are able to speak unprofitably and unintelligibly. Self will often dispose them to take off the edge, and dull the life of their teachings, under a pretence of filing off the roughness, and smoothing the diction. And if a plain and cutting passage occurs, it will cast it away, as too rustical and ungrateful. Thus in their preparations for public service, instead of consulting seriously, "What shall I say, and how shall I say it, so as best to please and glorify God, and do good to the souls of men," self will make them consult, "What shall I say, and how shall I deliver it, so as to be thought an excellent preacher, and to be admired and applauded by all that hear me."

And when self has done its work in their study, and made their sermon, it will attend them even to the pulpit, and there it will form their very countenance and gesture, and modulate their voice, and animate their delivery, and put the very accent and emphasis upon their words and syllables that all may be calculated to

please rather than profit, and to recommend themselves and secure a vain applause, rather than recommend Jesus Christ, and secure his interest in the hearts of men.

And when the sermon is ended, self goes home with the preacher, and makes him much more solicitous to know whether he is admired and applauded, than whether he has prevailed for the awakening and conversion of souls. And so powerful is this principle in some, that they could even be glad in their heart (were it not for shame) to ask their hearers, in direct terms, whether they like, admire, and applaud their labors, and conceive a good opinion of them. But as this will not do, self will put them on some topic of conversation with their hearers, that will tend, if possible, to draw out their own commendation; and if they can perceive they are highly thought of, they rejoice greatly, as having attained their end. But if they find they are esteemed but weak, or at best but common preachers, they are dejected and disappointed, as having missed what they think the grand prize of the day.

And hence this false, self-seeking heart, can be very easy and contented with a general approbation and applause, without seeing any saving fruit of ministerial labor, from year to year. Or if he desire success in the awakening and conversion of sinners, yet self may lie at the bottom of this too: and though it may work differently from the manner above described, yet it may terminate in the same thing in the final issue. Self may make such as these strive to excel in appearances of real godliness, and in zealous, fervent, practical preaching; yea, it may dispose them to desire success, to affect and change the hearts of their hearers, and they may calculate their discourses for that purpose, and yet aim ultimately at themselves, and the advancement of their own reputation. What can be more agreeable to a man who ultimately seeks himself, than to see people throng around him, and crowd in multitudes to hear him, and appear to be affected with what they hear? And to find that he is able to command their attention, and move their passions and affections; and what more pleasing than to hear himself cried up by them, as the most able and godly

preacher in the land, and famed through the whole country as a man of the highest spiritual excellencies, and most successful labor.

I mean not to insinuate that men of such mercenary and corrupt principles are likely to be very successful, for though it is possible they may do good, and God may bless what means he pleases; yet it seems more probable, that, as they labor not for God, but for themselves, he will leave them to themselves for the success: and that their labors will have no greater blessing than themselves are able to give, and that their words, how pungent soever, will reach no farther than their own strength is able to make them. But what I have asserted is, that self may make men desire success, so far as it may tend to the advancement of their reputation. Again,

Sometimes this selfish disposition will work up envious and bitter thoughts against all those who they imagine stand in their light, or by out-shining them, eclipse their glory, and hinder the progress of their idolized reputation. Hence they are inwardly vexed and mortified, when a preference is given to the names and parts of their brethren, as if all the praise given to others was injuriously taken from them, and that they themselves were not so particularly noticed, respected, and esteemed as their partial selfish judgment imagines they ought to be. And this often lays a foundation for jealousy, suspicion, and alienation, as if they were carrying on two different and contrary interests. It is this also, that makes some so tenacious of their own opinions, that they almost claim infallibility, and are ever impatient of contradiction or control. They esteem and value the man that will say as they say, and be of their opinion, and promote their reputation; but he who will dare to differ from, or contradict them, is not to be borne with. O, sirs! it is impossible to trace out all the corrupt workings of this detestable and pernicious principle, or to mention the innumerable mischiefs it has occasioned in the Church of God. It was this that raised anti-christ, by several gradual and progressive steps, to his present tyrannical dignity. It was this that enkindled the flames of persecution, in the sev-

eral periods of the Christian Church, and stained the earth with the crimson gore of human blood; and it is this disturbs and rends Christian societies, and divides them into different interests, and different parties, and fills them with bitterness against one another. "Oh! may the Lord in mercy deliver us from ourselves, as our worst enemy, and from the power and dominion of selfishness, as the sorest plague that can befall us on this side hell!"

But I have dwelt too long on this disagreeable subject, and shall therefore pass to the

Third general head, which was to show,

III. What it is to preach Christ. "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." All this also must be considered both materially, and formally, or as it respects the subject matter, and the formal manner of our preaching."

1st, As it respects the matter; it includes, in general, the whole sum of Gospel doctrine, relating to man's salvation by Jesus Christ; the original contrivance, the meritorious impetration, and actual application of it, through his blood and Spirit; the fall of man, "by one man's disobedience," and the guilt and ruin of a fallen state necessarily supposed; the original purpose of God's love and grace, that issued in the gift of his dear Son, the glory of his person as God, the eternal relation he sustained to the father, his substitution as a surety, and designation to the office of Mediator, his voluntary contract in the covenant of redemption, which made way for his mysterious incarnation, his holy life, his meritorious and cruel death, his powerful resurrection, triumphant ascension, and perpetual prevailing intercession; the complete atonement he made, and the everlasting righteousness he hath brought in; together with the various offices he sustained, both in his state of humiliation and exaltation: The methods of divine operation, in the work of effectual calling, the nature and use of divine faith, to apply his blood and righteousness; the blessings consequent on believing, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance in grace, and consummation in glory, perfection of holiness at death, and the complete happiness of soul and body at the resurrection, in the full enjoyment

of God to all eternity. These, and all other Gospel truths, supposed by them, included in them, and consequent upon them, relating to Jesus Christ, are to be the subject matter of our preaching; all which are summarily comprehended in the three characters mentioned in the text, Christ Jesus the Lord; Christ the Messiah, the annointed of God, qualified for, and set apart to, the office of Mediator; Jesus the Saviour of men, who saves his people from their sins, both from the guilt and power, and finally from the punishment of them, by working out for them a righteousness to be imputed; and by working in them a righteousness implanted, the Lord, the great head and king of his Church, who has its government on his shoulders, and to "whom all power is given in heaven and upon earth;" to whom all homage and obedience are due, and to whom is committed, as a person every way qualified and worthy, the sole management of the solemn transactions of the grand and final judgment.

But particularly, 1st, To preach Christ, is to hold him forth, not merely as a lawgiver, to be obeyed; but chiefly as a law-fulfiller, to be believed in, for pardon, righteousness, and everlasting life. To represent him to poor perishing sinners as surety, who has undertaken in their room and stead, to pay the debt of duty and of penalty, for which divine justice has them under an arrest; to atone for the crimes for which they are under sentence, and work out for them a complete and perfect righteousness, answerable to the strict demands of his unchangable law. How honorably soever we may speak of Jesus Christ as a ruler to be obeyed, and as a pattern to be imitated, yet if we do not exhibit him to view as the great law-fulfiller, to be believed in, and as "the end of the law for righteousness," we do not properly preach Christ, but conceal a most essential branch of his mediatorial excellency. It is the grand fundamental article of the religion of Christ, and the ground of all our hopes, "that he suffered for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; that he not only died for our good, (as the Socinians say, to set us an example how to suffer with patience;) but that he died "in our room and

stead," and was "made sin for us" by imputation, that we by imputation "might be made righteous in the sight of God through him."

2dly, To preach Christ, is to exhibit to view his infinite divine fullness, and the freeness of his unbounded grace, his almighty power to save, and his willingness to exert that power; that in him is to be found all that righteousness that the law requires, and all that grace that the Gospel promises; and, in short, that a poor, guilty, helpless, sin-burdened, and law-condemned sinner can possibly want; and that all the blessings of his atonement, are freely offered, "without money and without price."

3dly, To preach Christ, is to make him the grand centre of all the variety of subjects we enter upon, in the whole credenda and agenda of religion. If we treat of the nature and perfections of the Deity, we are to consider them as displayed most eminently "in the face of Jesus Christ." If we exhibit to view the divine law, in its strictness and spirituality, we are to remember Christ, "as the end of the law for righteousness." If we denounce its dreadful "curses against every one that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;" it is that "the law, as a school-master, may bring them to Christ, that they may be justified by faith." If we treat of Gospel promises and Gospel blessings, we must consider them as purchased by the blood, and distributed by the bounty and grace of Christ. If we discourse upon divine faith, Christ must be considered as "the author and finisher," as well as the direct object of it. If we treat of repentance, it is "Christ exalted at the right hand of God" that must give it, and "the remission of sins;" and Christ crucified, and viewed by faith, that must be the first spring of it. If we treat of Gospel obedience, it must be considered as the genuine fruit of faith in Christ, and union to him; springing from "constraining love to," and performed by strength and grace derived from the Lord Jesus Christ; and accepted altogether on account of the merit of his obedience and death. In a word, Christ must be considered as "all and in all, as the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end;" the fountain from which all is derived and the

centre in which all must terminate; his righteousness is all in justification, his Spirit and grace all in sanctification, and the enjoyment of him all in glorification. This is to preach Christ, as to the matter of our preaching. And then,

II. As to the formal manner, it implies, that we aim at the honor and glory of Christ, and the advancement of his interest, as our ultimate and final end. This is doubtless the principal thing intended, in opposition to those mercenary views and selfish aims that were mentioned before. Men may speak much about Jesus Christ in their sermons, and yet not properly preach Christ: yea, they may preach Christ too, as to the matter of their preaching, in all the instances above described, and yet not do it for Christ, but for themselves. And thus they make Christ himself, and the precious doctrines of the Gospel, only subservient to the advancement of the grand idol, Self. To preach Christ, then, is to make his honor and interest the centre of all our labor and industry; the mark on which we fix our eye, and toward which we endeavor to steer in all our private studies and public administrations, and in every instance of our ministerial conduct. Our business is to commend Christ, and not ourselves; to win the hearts of men to him, and not to ourselves; and attach them to his interest rather than our own. And as this must be the ultimate, proposed end, so those means must be chosen that have the most natural tendency to accomplish it? even such methods and manner of address as will tend to pierce the obdurate hearts, and wound the stupid consciences of sleepy, secure sinners, by making them feel the ruin of their fallen state, their guilt and condemnation by the law, and the absolute impossibility of obtaining a personal legal righteousness; that they may effectually see their need of Christ, both as a surety to pay their law-debt, and as a "fountain to wash in from sin and from uncleanness."

The rich and unbounded treasures of Gospel grace, are also to be laid open, and Gospel invitations to be exhibited in their free and indefinite terms, urged with the most powerful motives and persuasive arguments that can be

drawn from love or from wrath, from heaven or from hell; and from all the glorious and dreadful things of an unseen and eternal world.

Let me now endeavor to improve this subject by an inference or two from each of the principal foregoing heads; and then conclude with a particular application. And,

1st, If ministers are not to preach, or to seek themselves, in the execution of the sacred office, then none can ever discharge this important trust acceptably in the sight of God who are under the reigning dominion of mercenary and selfish principles. I have observed before, that when man fell from God by original apostasy, he retired as it were into himself, and is ever since disposed supremely to love, and ultimately to seek himself, as his last and final end. Selfishness, then, in one shape or another, is now the reigning, active principle in fallen nature, and has the entire dominion in every heart that is unrenewed and unsanctified; as, therefore, unsanctified men have no governing principle but self, and can act from no higher principles than they have, how can they be qualified for a faithful discharge of that work which requires so much self-renunciation? If such as these undertake the ministry, their views must be altogether selfish: they study, pray, and preach for themselves, and make themselves the grand centre of all they think, and speak, and do! "Seeking their own things," and not the things of Christ Jesus; preferring their honor to his honor, and their interest to his interest; and, therefore, they are guilty of idolatry, by setting themselves uppermost in their estimation, affections, designs, and pursuits. And if I should grant that such as these may be useful in the ministry, yet surely the undertaking will be awfully hazardous to the souls committed to their charge, and the consequence extremely dreadful to themselves, for, "when they have preached to others, themselves will be finally rejected and cast away."

2dly, If the business of Gospel ministers is to preach Christ, hence see the honor and dignity of their office. No other than a glorious Christ, the anointed of God, the darling of heaven, and the beloved of angels and

saints, is the subject of their ministry; from him their authority and commission is derived, in his valuable interest they are engaged to speak, as "ambassadors in his name and stead." Their office is, therefore, honorable in some proportion to the dignity of the sovereign from whom they receive commission; the grandeur of the court in whose interest they are employed as ambassadors, and the important errand they have to transact with guilty men. And as they are engaged for Christ, and employed by him to act as ambassadors in his name, he has declared that he will regard the treatment they meet with as if done to himself: "He that receiveth you, says he, receiveth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and Him that sent me." Were we acting a part for ourselves, and speaking in our own name, and driving on our own self-interests, men might treat us as they pleased; but if we act as ambassadors for Christ, in pursuit of his interest, and in his name and stead, let them take heed how they despise the sacred character we sustain, or neglect the solemn messages we bring. But I must not dwell on these inferences, the time being far elapsed.

Permit me, therefore, now, with all humility, to address myself particularly to the venerable members of this Synod, with all others of the sacred character here present.

My reverend fathers and dear brethren:

The subject I have now been handling will necessarily lead me to great freedom and plainness of speech, yet I will not entertain so dishonorable a thought of any of you, as to imagine an apology necessary: nor will I doubt your candid acceptance of what shall now be said, though by one of the meanest of the sacred character, who would gladly sit at your feet and learn, and who is willing to stand corrected or reproved by you.

Let what we have heard,

1. Lead us into our own hearts, to examine in the presence of an all-seeing God, whether we have not too much of this abominable selfish principle still lurking within us, and too little singleness of heart for God and Jesus Christ. Do we never shrink into diffidence and neglect in cases of duty, through the power and preva-

lence of that soothing temptation, Spare thyself? Do we never find this detestable enemy strive to encroach on the rights of the Godhead, and assume the honor and regard that is due to Jesus alone? Does it never creep into our studies, and seek to have a hand in our preparations for the sanctuary of the Lord, and dispose us to consult how to please, rather than how to profit; and how our own interest may be secured in the esteem and affections of our hearers, rather than how the interest and kingdom of Christ may be advanced? And when we enter the sacred desk, with a message from heaven to guilty men, are we never too thoughtful of the notices and observations of our poor fellow mortals round about us, and too little sensible of the all-seeing eye of Jehovah upon us, and the vast and inexpressible weight of the errand on which we come? Are we never too solicitous about mere external appearances that attend our delivery, and too little so about the spiritual frame of our hearts in the sight of God? Are we never tempted by this pernicious principle to play the hypocrite before our hearers, with a greater show of zeal, and fervor, and devotion than is answerable to the inward state and frame of our minds? If at any time we find ourselves dead and barren, and have but little clearness or freedom, we are dejected; our hearts are depressed and sunk within us: but from whence is this dejection? Is it because we have done so poorly for God, and been so miserably deficient in his service? Or only because we have made so indifferent a figure in the eyes of our fellow men? On the other hand, when we find some enlargement and freedom, a readiness of thought, and fluency of expression, and feel some suitable degree of zeal and fervor, does a selfish, deceitful heart never prompt us to a sort of self-complacency, and delight in ourselves? And if we are pleased that God has enabled us, in any measure, to be faithful, yet, are we never too much elated with the approbation and applause of those that have heard us?

And when our public performances are ended, what is the object of our greatest solicitude? Whether sinners are awakened and won to Christ, or whether we our-

selves are held in high esteem? Whether the word preached has gained their hearts for God, or whether it has gained for us their pleasing approbation? And does this selfish principle never direct or influence our conduct among the people of our charge? Are we not often best pleased with the company and society of those who (perhaps too partial in our favor) may gratify our vanity with their professions and tokens of esteem and friendship? And do we not, from the same principle, shun, or too much neglect, those who appear less friendly, though they need our instruction and advice as much as others? Do we not too much neglect the duties of private and particular applications, for fear of offending; and yet frame excuses for our neglects, that have too much selfishness in them? In a word, what did we undertake the ministry for? What do we study, preach, and pray, live, and labor for? It is ultimately for God or for ourselves? I beseech you, reverend and dear sirs, bear with this plainness and freedom, and let me not be looked upon in the light of an arrogant accuser; far be it from me to lay any of these things to your charge, or to harbor a doubt of your disinterested zeal for God, and victory over self. "There is but one heart among us that I have reason to suspect," and over that I find it necessary to keep a continual watch and guard: and oh! how many are the secret windings and turnings, and different shapes and appearances of this pernicious adversary, self! How often does it beset us, when and where we have little expected it, and give us occasion to lament and say, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" If we find then, on the abovementioned inquiry, that our self-denial and deadness to ourselves is yet very imperfect. Let us in the

Second place, Bitterly bewail it before God, with the deepest humiliation. For what can be more detestable, or carry a greater malignity in its very nature, than that disposition that would exalt self in the place of God and Jesus Christ, and as it were contend with him for the preference, and dispute the point with him who shall be most loved and regarded by us, he or we; and whose honor and interest shall be primarily pursued, his or our own? And how inconsistent is this selfishness with that

lesson of self-denial that we are obliged to preach to others, and which Jesus has taught us, both by precept and example. Nay, with what force can we recommend self-denial to others, while we are selfish, or how can we reprove or condemn the sin in others that we harbor too much in ourselves. We tell the drunkard, the swearer, the profane sinner, that "except he be converted and changed he can not be saved; and is it not as true of us, that we can not be the true disciples, or faithful ministers of Christ, except we deny ourselves." Does not our Lord himself lay this down as the grand criterion by which he submits his own doctrine and mission to trial, whether it was of God or whether he spake of himself. "He that speaketh of himself," says he, "seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, the same is true." I make no doubt, sirs, but selfishness in its reigning dominion, is a greater sin than drunkenness or whoredom. The one dishonors God by breaking his law; but the other strikes at the very relation of sovereign and subject, and contends with him, as it were, for the rights of Godhead, and insists on being above him in the estimation, affections, intentions, and pursuits. Now, "it is one thing to break some particular laws of a prince, and another to set up to be above him, or to exalt a rival in his room and stead;" the first indeed is transgression, but the other is downright treason and rebellion, and therefore the most heinous. And indeed whatever we do in religion, and how good soever it be, as to the matter or thing done, yet if self is the reigning principle, it tarnishes, corrupts, and debases all. And as it is the very essence of holiness to live to God, and act entirely for him, so it is horrible wickedness, in the very nature of it, to live to ourselves, and act ultimately for ourselves. If, therefore, we find the remains, or secret workings of so corrupt and detestable a principle, let us mourn and be humbled before God, and repair by faith to Him who once died, "That they which live should not live to themselves, but to Him who died for them, and rose again." Let us, in the third place,

Ever be watchful against this enemy of God and our souls, and endeavor to suppress the first risings of it.

Let us ever remember, "we are not our own," and therefore have no business to live to ourselves, or regard our interest or reputation, any further than the honor of Christ, and the interest of religion is concerned. If God has made us, if Christ has redeemed us, if in our ordination vows we have solemnly given up ourselves and our all to him, then certainly we are not our own; and therefore to appropriate our time and talents to our own interests and reputation is a sacrilegious robbing of God.

Further, let us guard against that fear of man that selfishness would prompt us to, and which would make us too fond to please, and too fearful to displease; for if we thus seek to please man, and by that means to advance ourselves, we can not be the faithful "servants of Jesus Christ." And yet, such are the perverse tempers of many we have to deal with, that we are often reduced to an unhappy dilemma, and must either offend God or offend them. Poor guilty mortals love to be soothed and flattered, but do not love to be plainly dealt with; hence, such pointed addresses as tend to discover them to themselves often excite their resentment. Thus, when our Lord was representing to his hearers, by several parables, the awful destruction that would shortly come upon the final rejectors of the Gospel Saviour, and the Gospel salvation, it is said: "the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that he spake of them." A heinous business indeed! as if it was intolerable insolence for him to speak of them. It is true, they perceived right, he did speak of them, and all others like them; and what then? Why, they are exasperated, and would have laid hands on him, and treated him in a manner they thought he deserved, had it not been that they feared the multitude. And when this is the case, that we must either offend God or men; whose displeasure shall we most regard? If carnal self is consulted, it will influence us to displease God, and to sooth and flatter our fellow-men. But alas! should we make such an awful sacrifice to their corrupt humors, will they undertake to answer it for us? Will they defend us from the displeasure of Jehovah, when he shall send for us by death, or sentence us to hell by his righteous judgment? No, they dare not attempt this,

nor dare we trust them in this matter. We have one God, and one Master to please, and he must be obeyed, whether men like or dislike. Our errand to them is on matter of life and death, the vast importance of which must engage all the powers of our souls. Poor Christless sinners are not in a state to be soothed and flattered, or jested and trifled with; heaven and hell are not matters to be talked of in a careless indolent strain; it is plain dealing such want, however they may take it; such as will tend to make them feel their wretched, miserable state, and awaken their solicitude for deliverance.

Again, our business is to preach Christ Jesus the Lord, and exhibit him to view in his personal glory and divine fulness as the law-fulfiller and Saviour of sinners; to urge them compassionately to come to him that they might have life, and on their final refusal, to denounce against them the terrors of eternal death. And besides the inexpressible importance of these things, every consideration from the present providences of God suggests an awakening call to the utmost diligence and painful industry. The God of heaven is now thundering an alarm on every side, our country is groaning under ravages and devastations, and all the frightful calamities of war and blood! The enemies of Zion are forming a confederacy, and saying: "Let us raze it, let us raze it to the foundation." And who can tell how soon our churches may be demolished and beaten into rubbish, and we ourselves called to prison and to death? And what, in the name of God, shall we do in a day of suffering, if we have not learned to deny ourselves, and account our honor, interest, and even life itself, nothing in comparison of the interest and kingdom of Jesus Christ? Or should God in mercy yet spare his Church from the ravages of Popish and Pagan adversaries, yet as to us, we know our time is short, and "the night of death will soon come when no man can work." We live in a dying world, and dwell in regions of mortality, and have lately had frequent and awful notices of the uncertain tenure of human life.

The last year in particular, with respect to ministers may very properly be called the dying year, in which the God of heaven has smitten his Church in these parts,

with repeated strokes of sore bereavement in a close and awful succession! Scarce had we time to dry our weeping eyes for the loss of one of eminent character and usefulness,* but the streams of grief were called to flow down afresh for the loss of another,† whose zeal for God and the conversion of souls, was scarce to be paralleled. And yet for all this, the anger of Jehovah was not turned away, but his hand was soon lifted up again, and with a dreadful aim, and resistless stroke, has brought down to the dust, perhaps the greatest pillar in this part of Zion's buildings.‡ Oh! how does the whole fabric shake and totter! And what a gloomy aspect do these providences wear? as if God, by calling home his ambassadors, was about to quit the affair of negotiating peace with mankind any more.

Shall not we, then, who survive, double and redouble our diligence, knowing our time is short, and in proportion to the decrease of laborers, the work increases upon our hands. O sirs! are heaven and hell glorious and dreadful realities? are sinners despising the one and sleeping over the mouth of the other, and are we sent from God to awaken them, and show them their danger? sent to offer them a Saviour and invite them to fly from the wrath to come to his atoning blood, why then, oh! why do not these important realities swallow up our whole attention? Why do not we make more haste in plucking sinners as brands from everlasting burning? Why do not we pray more fervently, and preach more zealously, and lay out our whole life, and soul, and strength in this great work? What! is the interest and happiness of deathless immortal souls worth no more pains? Can we do no more for the honor and interest of our glorious Master than this comes to? Shall the men of this world be more painful and industrious in seeking themselves, than we in seeking the glory of Christ, and the salvation of souls? God forbid! We are on

* The Rev. Mr. Aaron Burr, President of the College.

† The Rev. Mr. James Davenport, Minister at Hopewell, both of New-Jersey.

‡ The Rev. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New-Jersey.

matters of life and death. We pray, and preach, and labor for eternity. Sure it becomes us then to do it with all our might. Shall we not be solemn and serious, when so near that state and place where all are serious? Believe it, sirs, there is no trifling in the eternal world; there are none in jest, either in heaven or hell. God forbid, then, that we should jest and trifle with immortal souls, that are just at the door and upon the borders of an eternal state!

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